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ABOVE THE FRENCH LINES

LETTERS OF STUART WALCOTT
AMERICAN AVIATOR

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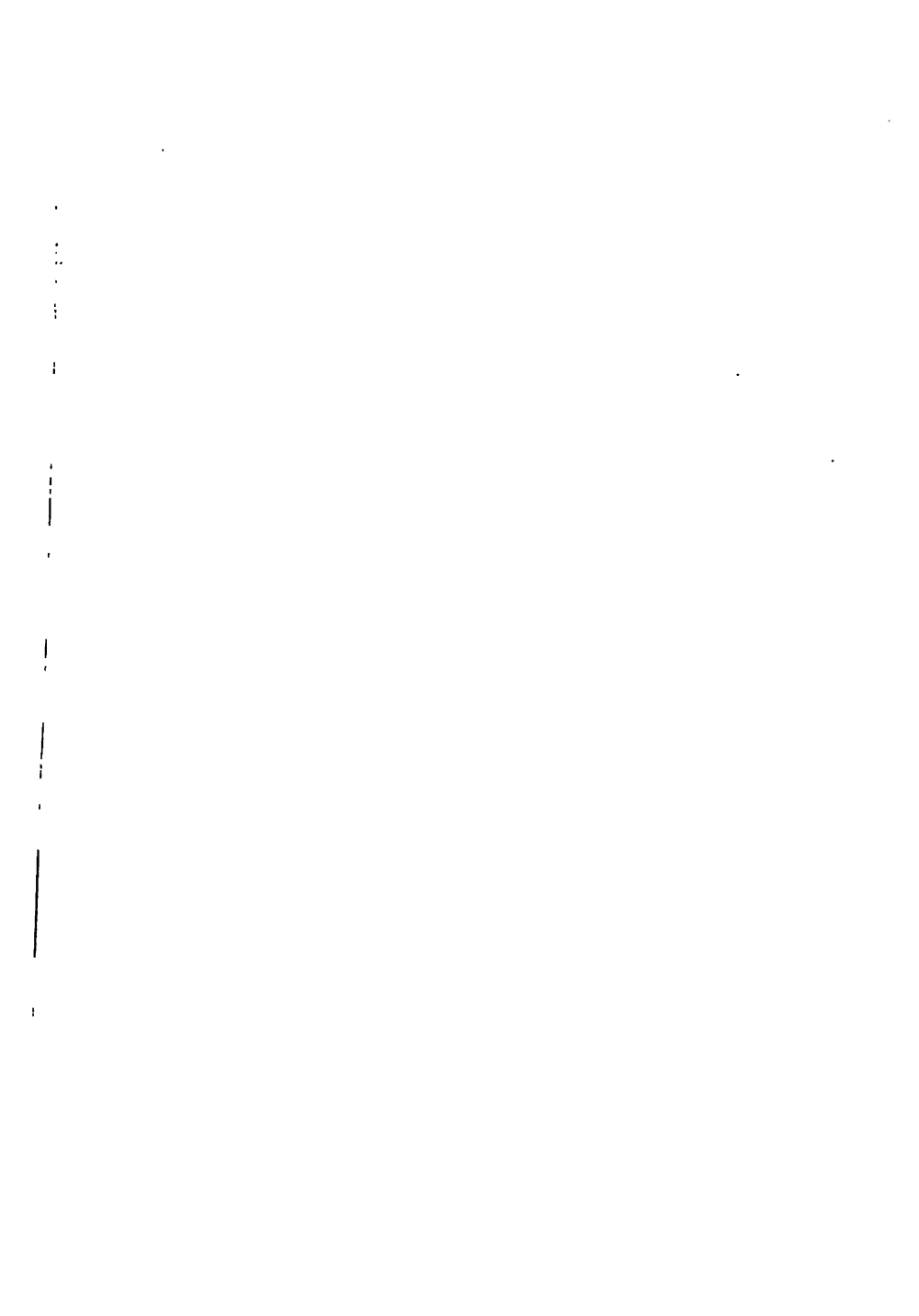
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CLASS OF 1912

A SOLDIER OF THE FOREIGN LEGION IN FRANCE

1915





STUART WALCOTT IN HIS AEROPLANE

ABOVE THE FRENCH LINES

LETTERS OF STUART WALCOTT,
AMERICAN AVIATOR: JULY 4,
1917, TO DECEMBER 8, 1917

^{c. (p)}
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON
LONDON: HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1918

Hw F 27.7.44.9

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Published April, 1918
Printed in the United States of America



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ABOVE THE FRENCH LINES

INTRODUCTION

[From the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* of January 30, 1918.]

It is now seven weeks since the dispatches from Paris reported that Stuart Walcott was attacked by three German airplanes and brought down behind the German lines, after he himself had brought down a German plane in his first combat on December 12, 1917, and that it was feared he had been killed; but even now, after the lapse of nearly two months, it is not definitely known whether his fall proved fatal, or whether the earnest hope of his friends that he is still alive may be realized. The reports are conflicting. A cable message of January 7 said that in Germany it was reported that S. Walcott had been killed by a fall on December 12 near Saint Souplet; but Dr. Walcott received a letter on January 19 which holds out some hope that the fall was not fatal and that his son may be a prisoner in Germany. This letter, dated Decem-

ber 17, is from a young aviator named Loughran,* who was Stuart Walcott's roommate at the flying station. He gives this report of what was told to him by an observer and pilot who saw the combat:

"On the 12th of December at 11:30 a. m., there were five pilots to go out on high patrol, including Stuart and myself. But I was prevented from going, because of a wrenched ankle. Stuart and the other pilots left here at 11:40 a. m. for high patrol, which means they are to fly above the thousand metres. Two of the pilots had to return because of motor trouble, leaving one pilot whom Stuart was following.

"At 12:50 a. m. they ran across a German bi-place machine. The French pilot attacked first, but had to withdraw because of trouble with his machine gun. He reports that the Spad [Stuart Walcott's machine], that had been following him, he last saw a thousand metres above him, or the German. Also that the German had gone back

* Loughran himself was killed in combat, in February, 1918. Attacked within the German lines, by four enemy planes, he succeeded in getting back over the French lines, but was there brought down. He was buried near Châlons. The Lafayette Escadrille attended his funeral.

over his lines. The infantry and artillery observers report the French pilot's attack and combat. And that six minutes later the German returned over our lines. And that the Spad that was seen flying at a very high altitude, came down and attacked the German, and succeeded in bringing him down in flames. In doing so he had to fly quite a way over the German territory. And that the Spad had started to return, when three German fighting machines were seen diving on him, and forcing him down. The Spad was last seen doing a nose-dive perpendicular, behind their lines. That is all the information I have received up to date.

"This is what makes all the boys think that Stuart is alive:

"A nose-dive perpendicular is used very often in combat, but is very dangerous, as it is very difficult for one to come out of and yet have their motor running; that reason might force him to land; also there was very little chance for him to get away from them by flying, as they were above, and the only sensible thing to do was to land; and as we were only three days in this *secteur*, the French think he might have been mixed up as to the direction for home; or that he was

slightly wounded and could not turn his machine toward the French lines.

"I have tried every way possible to get information about Stuart. I have sent the numbers of his motor and machine to Major S. yros, who is trying to trace it through the Red Cross service.

"One of the French pilots of this *escadrille*, who is a very good friend of your boy, shot down a German biplane on 13th of December. The machine fell behind our lines. The pilot was dead before reaching the ground. But the observer was only slightly wounded, so the boys of that *escadrille* have asked the commander of the group if we could be permitted to go and talk to the German, as he may know something about the Spad that fell behind his lines the day before. We hope to know whether we will be permitted to do so or not, tomorrow.

"It takes two months before we receive the report from Germany officially. In the meantime you will read all sorts of reports in the newspapers. But I will cable or have Capt. Peter Boal do so, if I get any news that is true.

"The case of Buckley, the American who fell Sept. 5, was reported as being in flames from five thousand metres down, and fell in German terri-

tory. The observers reported that it landed on its back and burned completely. His parents were notified of his death; newspapers reported the terrible death he died. Well, Sir, on November 25 we received a letter from him, saying he was enjoying the best of health and was satisfied with his surroundings in the prison camp in Germany.

"So we are all hoping the same for Stuart.

"I have all Stuart's personal things, and will give them to Capt. Boal the first chance I get.

"Mr. Walcott, it is beyond words for me to try and tell you how grieved we all are about Stuart, and how great a loss it is to the Escadrille, for him to be away. He was more than liked by every member and officer, and gave promise of doing great things, was always up in his machine trying to better himself in combat flying; there never was a minute that he was idle, if it was possible for him to fly. And never a more generous and kinder boy. Only the night before the patrol he last went out on, he gave me every care in the world, got up during the night to make sure I was comfortable and to do anything he could for my ankle.

"From one who has been with Stuart through all his training, and room-mate on the Front,

"Yours respectfully,

"E. J. LOUGHRAN."

This letter was written before the cable dispatch of January 7, from the International Red Cross, which seems to establish definitely the fact that Stuart Walcott gave his life in support of the endeavor to "make the world safe for democracy." In further and final evidence, a letter dated February 5, 1918, informed Dr. Walcott that the Red Cross agent in Paris had reported "Stuart Walcott's grave has been found." An accompanying map from Loughran shows that the spot where Stuart Walcott fell is on a hill a little South of Saint Souplet.

Benjamin Stuart Walcott was of New England ancestry. His earliest known American forbear was Capt. Jonathan Walcott of Salem, Mass., 1663-1699. Later, one of Capt. Jonathan's descendants, Benjamin Stuart Walcott, served in a Rhode Island regiment during the Revolutionary War. On his mother's side two ancestors served in the Continental Army and in the Revolutionary War.

FROM PRINCETON TO FRANCE

Stuart Walcott was a senior at Princeton in the winter of 1916-17. In view of his approaching graduation in the spring his father wrote to him that he had best begin to think about what he was to do after graduation in order that he might get on an independent basis as soon as practicable. In response under date of January 7, 1917, he wrote:

"You spoke of my being independent after I graduate in the spring. If I go to Europe, as I want to, to drive an ambulance or in the aeroplane I will be doing a man's work and shall be doing enough to support myself. If the work is unpaid, it is merely because it is charitable work and as such is given freely. If you want to pay my way, I will consider it not as dependence on you, father, but as a partnership that may help the Allies and their cause. I will furnish my services and you the funds to make my services available. If not, I will be willing to invest the

small amount of capital which has accumulated in my name. I have been thinking of this work in Europe for over a year now, and am still very strong for it. I don't know what the effect will be on myself, but if it will be of service to others, I think that it is something I ought to do."

Being assured that the expenses would be provided for, he then began an investigation as to the best method of procedure to obtain training as an aviator. In a letter dated January 26 he said:

"Many, many thanks for sending me the book on the French Flying Corps by Winslow. I read half of it the night that it came and stayed up late last night to finish it. He gives a very straight, interesting and apparently not exaggerated account of the work over there, which has made it somewhat clearer to me, just what it is that I want to get into. Now I am even more anxious than I was before to join the service over there. The more that I think about it and the more that I hear of it, the more desirous I am of getting into the Flying Corps. If a man like Winslow with a wife and daughter dependent on

him is willing to take the risk involved, I see no reason why I should not.

"You mention the Ambulance service in your last note. I have thought of that quite a little and would definitely prefer the aviation. The ambulance is worth while, I think, in that it gives one an opportunity to be of great service to humanity, but not so much so as the other. There will be a number of my classmates who will enlist in the American Ambulance this spring, but the air service appeals to me."

He then made arrangements with the American representatives of the Lafayette Escadrille to go to France on the completion of his college year. On January 29 he wrote:

"I will get a physical examination in a few days. In regard to getting the training over here first, I do not think that it would be worth while. The instruction over there would be first hand, bright, for a definite purpose and on the whole superior to what I could get here. I could also be picking up the language and the hang of the country at the same time."

On February 24 he received word that his

papers presented with his application for admittance to the Franco-American Flying Corps assured him on their face of a welcome when he presented himself in Paris. He was informed that if he utilized his spare time in availing himself of any and every opportunity to familiarize himself with flying, it would shorten his stay in the Student Aviators School in France. On March 26 he wrote:

“I haven’t been able to find out anything definite about the school at Mineola. As yet, no change has been announced to my knowledge, in reference to hastening up the course in event of the coming of war. Over a hundred men have left college [Princeton] already to start training for the Mosquito Fleet, and the rest of them are drilling every afternoon. What do you think of the advisability of stopping college and going to some aviation school? Considering that it takes several months to become at all useful as an aviator and that war is practically inevitable now, I think it would be wise to get started right away.”

And again, on April 3:

"I saw in the morning paper that the American fliers in France would be transferred to American registry immediately after the declaration of war. When you next see General Squier, I wish that you would sound him on the probability of a force being sent to France to learn to fly according to French methods. That is the one thing above all others that I want to get into. If there is any chance of that I do not want to get involved in anything else. . . .

"It is quite certain that seniors who leave college now, to go into military work, will receive their degrees. I would not object to losing the work as it is not my present intention to keep on with theoretical chemistry and that is what I am devoting my time to this spring. From the standpoint of education alone, I think that my time could be more profitably spent in the study of aviation."

Leave was granted by the University, and on April 6 Stuart Walcott was appointed a special assistant to Mr. Sidney D. Waldon, Inspector of Aeroplanes and Aeroplane Motors, Signal Service at Large. He immediately reported to Mr. Waldon and worked with him through

April. May first he went to Newport News, Virginia. May 2 he reported:

"My first trip up was this afternoon with Victor Carlstrom. We were out 16 minutes and climbed 3,500 feet. It was all very simple getting up there—a little wind and noise and some bumps and pockets in the air—a glorious view of the Harbor. Then we started to come down. First, I saw the earth directly below through the planes on the left. Then the horizon made a sudden wild lurch and Newport News appeared directly below on my right. This continued for a little while and then we started down at an angle of about 30 degrees to the perpendicular, turning as we went. I later learned that Carlstrom had executed a few steep banks or sharp turns and then spiralled down. It ended with a very pretty landing, following with a series of banks to check speed. Flying from my first impression is a very fascinating game and the one I want to stay with for a while. I have signed up for 100 minutes in the air. While this hundred minutes will not make me a flier by any means I think it is well worth the while in that it gives me a little element of certainty in going abroad. I will know if all goes well that I am not unable to fly."

The next day he wrote:

“Two flights this morning, 25 minutes *in toto*. The greatest sport I ever had. Wonderful work. I did most of the work after we got up a safe distance.”

Having obtained a certificate of 100 minutes flight and passed the necessary physical examinations, he left for France, arriving at Bordeaux May 31, and soon reported at Avord for training.

STUART WALCOTT'S LETTERS

I

AVORD,

July 4, 1917.

Dear H———:

. . . My work here is going well, although slowly. Those in my class ought to get out by October if nothing goes wrong. There are some 150 Americans learning to fly now in France, besides the ones the Government may have sent over—more than a hundred at this one school, and the oddest combination I've ever been thrown with: chauffeurs, second-story men, ex-college athletes, racing drivers, salesmen, young bums of leisure, a colored prize fighter, ex-Foreign Légionnaires, ball players, millionaires and tramps. Not too good a crowd according to most standards, but the worst bums may make the best aviators. There's plenty of need for all of them.

There are lots of Frenchmen here also and a big crowd of Russians, mostly happy youngsters

having a very good time. They're always in a hurry to get up in the air and are continually breaking machines and their necks. The Americans have an endless streak of luck in being able to fall out of the air and collect themselves uninjured from amidst a pile of kindling wood which was the machine. As yet I haven't done any piloting in the air, so can't talk very wisely about the glories and thrills of slipping through the ephemeral clouds. All I have learned is that almost any kind of a dub can be a pilot, but that there aren't a lot of very good ones. The idea is to get enough practice to become a good one before arguing with the elusive Boche at a high altitude.

It looks over here as though there would be about two years more of war, judging from what most people say. It is to be hoped that after twelve to eighteen months we will be able to take France's place at the front, for she deserves to be relieved and will have to be. Even now, France is almost spent; it will be England and the United States who will finish the war. This war is a terrible thing, but for America it is an opportunity as well. I am glad that we have at last come into it and that it will be no half-way

fight that we must put up. The Canadians have been about the best regiments in the war. Why shouldn't America be as good? . . .

STUART.

II

ESCOLE D'AVIATION MILITAIRE

AVORD, CHER, FRANCE.

Friday, July 13, 1917.

You see it's Friday, the thirteenth, my lucky day, and I'm happy because the work is going well. First, I'll tell you about a smash I had a week or so ago.

The roller or *Rouleur* class which I smashed in has the same machine as those that fly with a 45 P motor. Only it is throttled down, and we are supposed to keep it on the ground—just about ready to fly, but not quite getting up—a speed of about 30 m.p.h. When there is the slightest wind we can not roll, because the wind turns the tail around and swings the machine in a circle—a wooden horse—*cheval de bois*. I rode about the end of the list Saturday—and the wind had come up as the day got on. Work stops at 8:30 a. m. always because there's too much wind. My first sortie or trip went O.K. with a considerable breeze on the tail, but on the second there was

too much wind and after I got going pretty fast—around she went. The wind caught under the inside wing and up it went. Smash went the outside wheel, and a crackle of busting wood. All the front framework of wood that holds the motor was smashed—a pretty bad break. The monitor was a bit mad and talked to me a bit in French.

The next morning I was called in to see the chief of the Blériot school, Lt. de Chavannes, a very nice officer. He told me that my monitor was not satisfied with me—that he had told me to do something (cut the motor when the machine started to turn) three separate times, and that each time I had intentionally disobeyed, that if anything like that happened again I would be radiated (discharged from the school). That was quite the first I had ever heard of it and I was so mad at the monitor that I could have kicked him in the head. I tried to explain to the Lieutenant but he never heard a word, so I just gurgled with wrath and didn't do anything. But yesterday we got another monitor who is a different sort.

The class after *rouleur* is *decollé*—it is the same machine, but one gets off the ground about

a metre or two, then slacks up on the motor and settles to the earth. It is strictly forbidden to *decollé* in the *rouleur* class. This morning I had a *sortie* in the *rouleur* and all of a sudden noticed that I was in the air a bit—managed to keep it straight and get out of the air without smashing. The monitor said nothing so I *decolléed* on all the *sorties*. When I got out the monitor explained that it was strictly forbidden to go off the ground in the *rouleur* class, that I shouldn't have done it, and then asked me if I would like to go up to the other class. Whereupon consenting, I am now in the *decollé* class, leaving sixteen rather peeved Americans who arrived in the *rouleur* the same time I did, who can perform in the *rouleur* quite as well as I can and who will remain in the *rouleur* for some time yet. They've no grudge against me, however, as it was only a streak of luck on my part. Later in the morning I had some *sorties* in the *decolleur* and got up two or three metres. The wind was too strong, so my trips were a bit rough, but nothing was damaged—so hurrah for Friday, the thirteenth.

III

July 17, 1917.

The work has been going very well since last I wrote you, which was only two or three days ago. I told you about at last leaving the blessed roller; I never was so relieved in my life. The first evening in the *decollé* class, I was requisitioned to turn tails and the morning after there was too much wind to work. The *decollé* is the one where you go up two or three metres and settle down by cutting speed. The first time I had three sorties in the wind, bounced around a lot, but did no damage. The next time was first thing in the morning. Two metres up on the first, four or five on the fifth—strictly against orders. I even had to *piqué*—point the machine toward the ground—a little, which is not at all *comme il faut* in the *decollé*. But these Frenchmen are funny chaps—sometimes they will get terribly angry and punish one for disobeying, and again they will be tickled to death with it. If I had smashed while doing more than I was

told to, there would have been a lot of trouble; as it was, no objection—and the monitor personally conducted me to the *piqué* class with a very nice recommendation.

Now there are two *piqué* classes: one with a *piste* about a quarter of a mile long, in which one is supposed to do little more than *decollé*, get up about five metres and *piqué un tout petit peu*—hardly at all. After comes the advanced *piqué* with a much longer *piste* on which one can get up 100 metres (300 feet). On my first sortie in the *piqué*, I was told to roll on the ground all the way, so continuing my policy, did a low *decollé*. Next I was supposed to do a two metre *decollé*, so went up ten and *piquéd*. Had ten sorties in that class one morning, getting as high as I could—about twenty metres—and went to the advanced *piqué* that night—last night. Four sorties there last night with a machine with a poor motor, so didn't get up over a hundred feet.

And this morning I did my first real aviating. There was a bit of wind blowing, so the monitor, Mr. Moses, only let a Lieutenant and me go up, as we had gone better than the others last night. First it was a bit rainy and always bumpy as the deuce—air puffs and pockets which require the

entire corrective force of the wing warp and rudder to overcome. My last sortie was decidedly active. The wind had developed into a bit of a breeze which is to a Blériot like a rough sea to a row boat. Two or three times I got a puff that tipped the machine 'way over—put the controls over as far as I could and waited. It seemed a minute before she straightened. The trouble was that the machine was climbing and therefore not going very fast. If I had *piqué*d, it would have corrected quicker. I had no trouble at all in making the landing. Hopping out of the machine, I saw the head monitor rushing over to Mr. Moses on the double, shouting volubly in French and berating him severely. I gathered that he had been watching my manoeuvres, expecting something to fall every instant, and that he strenuously objected to Moses' letting me go up. Work stopped there for the morning, and it was very fully explained to me what the trouble was. If I have some sorties there tonight, I go to *Tour de Piste* (Flying Field) in the morning. I may be on Nieuport in two weeks.

I am now beginning to see the advantages of the Blériot training. There is a great deal of preliminary work on or near the ground. In all

other aviation training, such as at Newport News, 90 per cent of the work is in making landings—in piquéing down, redressing at the proper moment and making gradual connections with the earth. I haven't made a really bad landing yet and the reason is that I have been in a machine so much on and near the ground, that I have sort of developed a sense or feel of it, and almost automatically redress correctly, and settle easily. Also I can tell pretty closely what is flying speed because of the work on the rollers. It's the same way with all the other students only I know it now from my own experience.

And this morning I began to realize that my hundred minutes at Newport News was invaluable. I not only found out some of the tricks of a master hand (Carlstrom) but also developed a bit of confidence in the air, and air sense, without which I could have got into trouble this morning. My bumpy ride this morning is absolutely invaluable. I'll probably never have so much trouble in the air again, because a fast machine or even a Blériot with a good motor, would hardly have noticed these puffs. It was a bit risky, I guess, or the head monitor would not have been worried, but now that it's over, I know a lot more.

IV

August 11, 1917.

Dear ———*:

You have certainly developed into a wonderful correspondent. Honest-to-goodness, a letter you started my way about a month ago was quite the most satisfactory and amusing thing I've received since I've been over here. Based on practically no material, yet it was alive with interest, every line. There's nothing like a finishing school education. If I thought that you could knit, I would immediately appoint you as my *marraine* (godmother), for it's quite possible for one person to have more than one soldier and I am but a soldier of the second class in the French Army. As I understand it, the chief duty of a *marraine* is to write letters—you've started that in good style—and to knit wool scarfs, which the devoted soldier hands to a French peasant woman to unravel and make a pair of socks out of. . . .

* One of his school friends.

Many Yale boys have wandered in upon us of late, Alan Winslow, Wally Winter, George Mosely, and others. Also Chester Bassett, late of Washington and Harvard University, who I believe has the good fortune to be acquainted with you, a very recommendable young man. They tell me that Cord Meyer is aviating at some camp nearby, but, not having any machines, they have to spend their time touring the country in a high powered motor.

Had a long and gossipy letter from Pat the other day, containing details of many weddings and engagements, even unto young ————. All my classmates are doing the same stunt. How about being original and waiting until the war is over and seeing who of the competitors are left? I quite expect to be, but it's luck I'm trusting to; there's a lot of war left in the nations of Europe. One never can tell; I may come home on permission in a French uniform with a wing on my collar. . . . When the American Air Service is a little further along, it may be that we will be taken over from the French Army.

I finished up in one division of the school the other day and passed to another for brevet, the

tests for a military aviator. I sort of have the impression that I wrote you a few weeks ago about it, but not being sure, run the risk of repetition, which, if any, I hope you will excuse. This epistle is being written out at the *piste* (flying field), waiting for the wind to drop enough to fly, and with me seated amidst a bunch of Russians, so if there are any superfluous "iskis" or "ovitches" in this, you will understand why. The Russians are great fliers; in fact they know so much about it that they never listen to their monitors and as a result break more machines than all the other pupils combined. A month ago five of them went to the next school for acrobacy and in a week every one of them had killed himself. I pulled a bit of the same Russian stuff in the spiral class of the Blériot. All the work is solo—never a flight double command so one has to get instructions on the ground and follow them in the air.

I used my head and senses in performing my first spiral, instead of shutting my eyes, doing what I had been told and trusting to God. The result was that I made one more turn than I expected to and that quite perpendicular, not at all *comme il faut* in a Blériot. Why something did

not break has been the wonder of the Blériot school. But nothing did and we got down all right. Another time I planted a cuckoo on her nose, which is not at all encouraged by the monitors. 'Tis quite a trick to balance a monoplane on its nose on the ground, but I did it—quite vertical she lay, with me in the middle struggling with the safety belt and wondering which way it was going to fall. My final appearance in the Blériot school was likewise spectacular. The left wing hit a hole in the air which the right one didn't. Naturally things tipped; then they wouldn't straighten and the only thing to do was to dive to the low side. I did, but forgot to shut off the motor. A very steep and fast spiral resulted in which I lost 500 feet in a half-turn in about two seconds, I think, all with the motor going to beat the cars. I must have been traveling at many hundreds of miles an hour. Once again nothing broke, but it was no fault of mine that it didn't. . . .

Sincerely,

STUART.

V

August 25, 1917.

I started for my altitude test three days ago. The requirement is one hour above 2,000 metres. I got to 1,950 metres and one cylinder refused to fire, so I was forced to come down. The next morning I tried again, got to 900 metres and the magneto ceased to function, thereby stopping all progress. I glided toward home, but didn't have quite the height to make the *piste*, so had to land in a nearby field, just dodging a potato patch. A flock of curious sheep came around and carefully examined the machine, getting considerably mixed up in the wires of the open tail construction and leaving considerable wool thereon. When the mechanics eventually got the motor going, I started off, didn't get quite in the air before the motor went bad and then I ran into a bean patch, gathering about a bushel of beans with the same tail wires. Yesterday morning I tried again, climbed to 2,000 in fourteen minutes and to 3,500 metres (11,500 feet) in forty

minutes. I went up through some light clouds and when I got to 8,500, the top of my recording barograph, more clouds had formed and I was practically shut off from the earth, nothing but a beautiful sea of clouds below me, a very beautiful sight. One other machine was in sight, far below me, but on top of the clouds. Not wanting to get lost I came down through the clouds and stayed out my hour just above 2,000 and below the clouds, where the air was very much churned up, keeping me very busy. Just as soon as the time was up I came down with a pair of very chilled feet, making the 2,000 metres in five minutes to the ground. No work since then on account of bad weather.

This morning I attended my first Catholic funeral, that of the commandant of the school who was the victim of a mid-air collision, a very unusual accident. The other machine got down safely though badly smashed. Everybody in camp attended the funeral in the chapel of the Artillery Camp next door. I understood none of the service, but the music by a tenor and a 'cello was excellent. While the cortège was going down the hill to the cemetery, a Nieuport circled overhead very low for half an hour or

more and dropped a wreath. It was a very impressive ceremony.

I expect to start on triangle and *petit voyage* in a few days. When they are done, I will be a breveted flier in the French Army. Then comes *perfectionné* work and acrobacy, so it will be quite a while yet for me.

VI

August 31, 1917.

Dear _____*:

Here it is almost September and I am still a dog-goned *élève pilote*. Verily, every time I think of how the time passes along without results, I go wild. My complaint is caused by the west wind, which has blown about twenty-five days during the month of August and seems likely to continue well on into September. The only variety is an occasional storm. For the past two weeks I've been waiting to start my voyages, two trips to a town forty miles away and back and two other triangular trips about 180 miles long each. When they are done, one becomes a *pilote élève*; and there's a great if subtle difference when the words are reversed. An *élève pilote* is the scum of the earth, looked down on by mechanics, pilots, monitors, and everyone else; a *pilote élève* can wear wings on his collar and is as good as any one else. He is permitted to fly

* One of his school friends.

in rough weather, to take chances and is not in so much danger of getting radiated if he gets in trouble. The proper thing to do on a triangle or *petit voyage* is to have something bust directly over a nice château; make a skilful landing on the front lawn under the eyes of the admiring household and then be an enforced guest for a few days until one is rescued by a truck and mechanics. One has to be very careful where the *panne de moteur* catches him lest he have to make his landing in a lake or on a forest, which is apt to be a bit awkward. One chap, an American, has been out on a triangle for two weeks, staying at some country place, and there are four others at another school near a big town waiting for weather to return. Reports give us to believe they are having a much better time there than we are here.

Between here and the point for the *petit voyage*—a little bit off the route, is the big future American aviation camp and also an Artillery camp. There are quite a bunch of fellows there, Quentin Roosevelt, Cord Meyer, etc., I think. Every American that has left on his voyages in the last month has stopped there against all orders and been bawled out by the monitor. One

has to keep a recording barometer or altimeter machine, a barograph, during the voyages, which indicates all stops. One chap came back home the other day with a barometer record showing beyond the shadow of a doubt that he had made a stop of about fifteen minutes *en route*. The monitor saw it, said, "*Alors*, all you Americans stop off there, I don't like it." Then the chap tried to explain how he had had a *panne* and come down in a field out in the country somewhere, fixed the motor and come on home. He almost got away with it, but the monitor happened to snook around a bit and noticed on the tail very clearly written a good Anglo-Saxon name, the name of the town, and the date—quite indisputable evidence. I fully expect to have a *panne* there myself before long.

By the way, to declare a short pause in my chronicle of aviation, how about all those "letters that are to follow"? If you try to tell me how good you are to your Belgian soldier, I refuse to believe a word until you treat me in the same way. And I also refuse to accept anyone as a *marraine* (isn't that what you call these fairy godmother persons one is supposed to correspond with during the war and marry afterward?

How inconsiderate some of them are, to take three or four soldiers, just assuming that not more than one will survive; however, they may be wise to have more than one iron in the fire. But my parenthesis grows apace.)—I say I refuse a *marraine* until she approves her ability. But let me see again. Does said *marraine* have to be a complete stranger? It seems to me that is customary, and also usually they are of different nationalities. All of the foregoing weak line will be interpreted as a mere plea for that other letter. I've never made this "absence makes the heart grow fonder" stuff at all. Even —— has given me up; I remain to her only another of the forgotten conquests (?) of the dead past.

. . .

This odd person, Bassett, wandered in all dressed up like a patch of blue sky and I just had to let you know he was here. With absolute confidence in each other's integrity, we put our loving messages side by side. By the way, he is a good scout, don't you think? I have gotten to like him immensely since he has been here. I never had a better time in my life than one evening in Paris with Chet. However quiet the party, he is the life of it.

It must be that I take my weekly shave—in cold, cold water, with a dull, dull razor. Oh, happy thought! Tell the father and brothers hello from me. Also tell —— to drop me a line of what he's doing and when he's coming over.

STUART.

VII

September 1, 1917.

The wild man in the Nieuport was out again this morning giving some one a joy ride. There is a long straight stretch of road in front of our *piste* and he came down that several times, a nasty puffy wind blowing which bothered him not at all, flying only two or three feet off the ground. In front of the *piste* is a telephone wire crossing the road. He came along the road 100 miles an hour until almost on top of the wire and jumped up just in time to clear it by a few feet—really beautiful work. He goes all over the surrounding country flying low, hopping over trees and houses, sometimes turning up sideways to slip between two trees a bit too close together to fly through; sometimes dragging a wing through the space between a couple of hangars or doing vertical *virages* just in front of them. It doesn't seem possible that any man can be so much a part of his machine, can be so consistently accurate

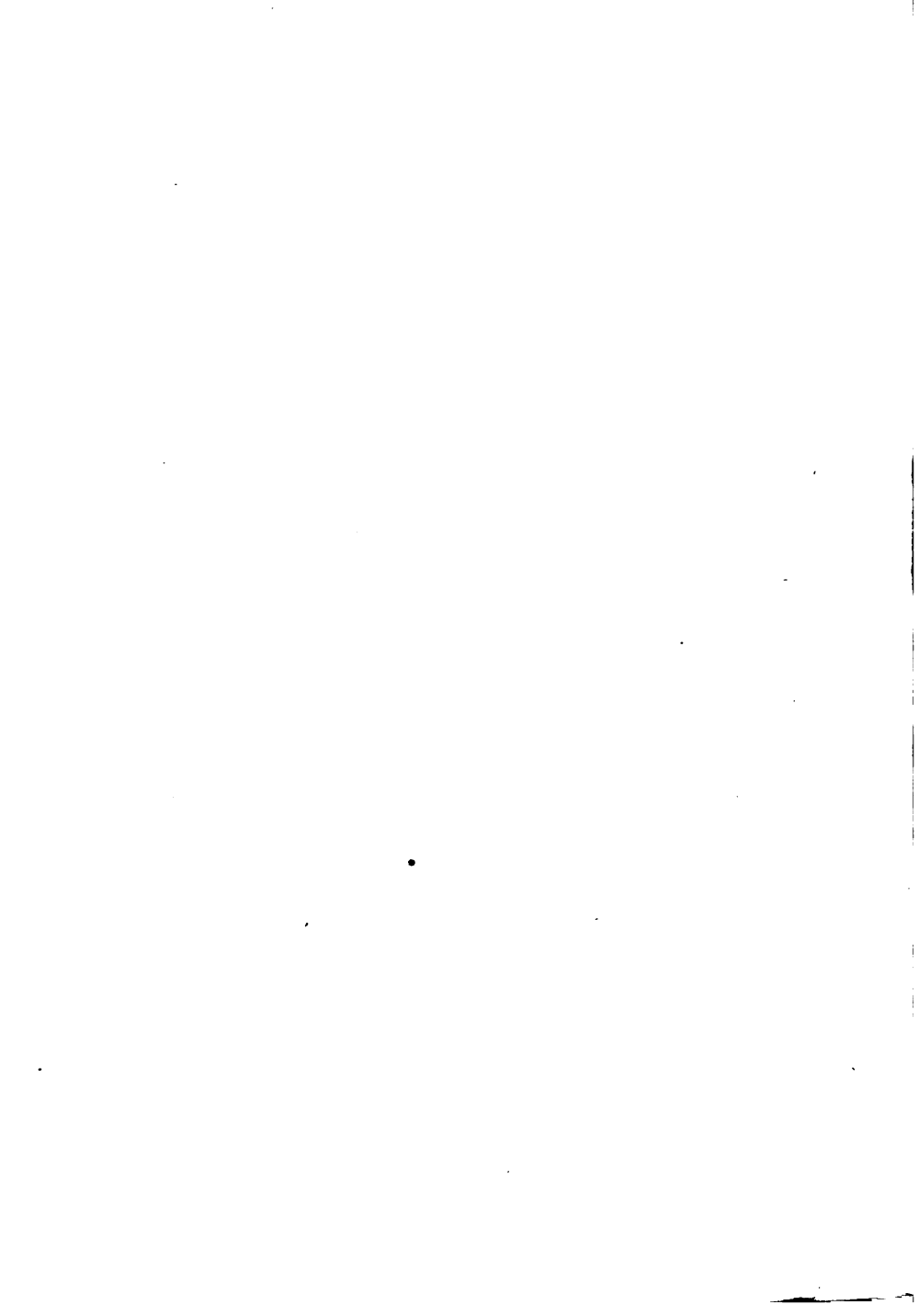
that he never misses. For this chap, Lumière, has never had a smash. . . .

A chap named Loughran started off on one of his brevet voyages a few days before I got ready for brevet. He got quite a ways along, ran into a storm, went above it, got caught in a cloud, kept on for quite a long way being drifted by a strong wind, then came down through the clouds and found that they were only 400 feet above the ground. After a while he found a place to land and came down safely. He went to a farmhouse, got his machine guarded and tied down. In the meantime word had spread over the countryside that an aviator had come down there and the entire population came out to look him over. A grand equipage drove up with a Count who lived in a nearby château. He insisted that Eddie come to the château and accept their hospitality. There the fortunate Ed stayed five days; the Countess talked English, and also some house guests. He hadn't brought a trunk so borrowed razor, etc., from the Count; went down to see the machine every day in the baronial barouche. Whenever he went to the little town in the vicinity all the kids followed him around the streets and when at last he left, he was presented with a

multitude of bouquets and had to kiss each and every donor. He brought back pictures of the château—a delightful looking old place—and numerous addresses.



STUART WALCOTT AT THE FRONT



VIII

September 4, 1917.

At last the two weeks of wind and rain has ceased and now it is perfect weather—a bit of a breeze and lots of sun for the last two days. Yesterday morning there weren't enough machines to go around so I did not work, making the eighth consecutive day I hadn't stepped in a machine. Last evening I at last and with much rejoicing started out on my "maiden voyage" to another school about 60 kilometres away (37.5 miles). It was delightfully easy—nothing to do but climb two or three thousand feet and just sit there and watch the country unfold, comparing the maplike surface of the earth spread out below with the map in the machine. In good weather it is very easy to follow, spot roads, towns, woods, rivers and bridges. Railroad tracks get lost at high altitudes and are harder to find anyway. One has to keep an eye open for a place to land within gliding distance in case of a *panne* always, but the country is so flat and so much cultivated

around here that it is absurdly simple. I endeavored always to keep some pleasant looking house or château in range in case of trouble, for the French are proverbially hospitable to aviators *en panne* (lying to, descending).

Coming back yesterday evening, the sun was pretty low and the air absolutely calm, nothing but the drone of the motor and the wind; the only movements necessary an occasional slight pressure on the joy stick to one side or the other to keep the proper direction. I came very nearly going to sleep, it was so peaceful up there; several times closed my eyes and swayed a bit. As a matter of fact one is perfectly safe at that altitude—anything over a thousand feet—because the machine, at least this particular type, won't get into any position from which one cannot get it out within 200 metres at most. But nevertheless I haven't tried any impromptu falls as yet.

This morning I repeated the same identical performance, because for some reason we have to do two *petits voyages*, and had much the same kind of a time as yesterday. On the way home one cylinder quit its job and threw oil instead, covering me from head to foot and clouding up my goggles so I had to wipe them off about every

minute. When I got back the mechanics decided that that motor had died of old age and would have to be repaired, so I am again without a machine. Have watched a beautiful afternoon pass by from the barracks when without my luck I'd be working. But with a machine and weather, I can be finished tomorrow; two triangles to do about 200 kilometres (125 miles) each and I can do one in the morning and the other in the evening and then I'm breveted. Perhaps by day after tomorrow I'll start *perfectionné* on Nieuport. I hope so.

IX

September 9, 1917.

Since my last to Father, I have had some very interesting times. First, I finished my *brevet* with very little excitement, made all my voyages and only got lost a little bit once. Then I saw two machines on the ground in a field, made a rather dramatic spiral and steeply banked descent amidst a crowd of villagers and got away with it; then found that the machines belonged to two monitors who were bringing them from Paris and had effected a *panne de château*. Being asked what I was doing, I fortunately found a spark plug on the burn and got that repaired. The rest of it was very easy, a bit of flying in the rain which stings the face a bit, but is not bad otherwise.

Since I have been on the Nieuport. There are three sizes of machines on which one is trained, starting with the larger double command and going to the smallest. At Pau, we get another even smaller, about as big as half-a-minute. Four

times I went out without a ride—bad weather, crowded class and busted machines, the same old story. Then last night I had my first rides with a monitor who is rather oldish, crabbed and new at his job, a brand new aviator. As you know, when an airplane takes a turn, it does not remain horizontal but banks up: *comme ça* (if you can interpret that illustration—it shows signs of remarkable imaginative power)—*alors*, one banks to take a turn and uses the rudder only a very little because the machine turns along when banked. There is a sort of falling-out feeling the first few times until one becomes a part of the machine.

To get back to the story, this monitor does not like to bank his machine and sort of sidles round the corners, keeping it quite flat and almost slipping out to the outside of the turn. I have done many fool things in a machine and made many mistakes, but never have I been so scared in anything in my life as when riding with this monitor. A monitor is supposed to let the pupil drive as much as he is able, but this bird never let me make a move, and when we got through told me I was too brutal. I was never madder in my life and cursed nice American cuss words all the way

home. There's a fifteen kilo ride in a seatless tractor back to camp to improve a bad humor.

Well, this morning I saw some more rides impending and didn't like it, so asked the *chef de piste* to put me with another monitor. He had to know why and I registered my kick, which practically said that the first monitor didn't know his business and couldn't drive, that I was scared to ride with him. The *chef* was a bit sarcastic and told me to take two rides with another monitor to show how *I* could make a *virage*. I did it the way I've been accustomed to, made a fairly short turn; when we got down, the monitor said "*Epatant*" (Am. "stunning") or something like that to the *chef*. The *chef* had meanwhile communicated my complaint to the first monitor and he was the maddest man I ever saw. Demanded what "*Ce type là*" (indicating me) wanted, said the *virages* I had just made were dangerously banked (the monitor I was with didn't mind, though) and then all three started arguing at once at me and I spelled all the French I knew. About that time I thought of what you had just told me in a letter about trusting in Latin, which advice and remarks I have come to agree with very much (my admiration for the French has

waxed less daily), and here I realized that I had very successfully made a fool out of a man who was supposed to be my teacher, and he fully resented it.

Then, of all things, the lieutenant, without further remarks, said I was to continue with my first monitor. My heart sank into my feet. I had visions of staying in that class without rides or with only rides and fights for months; I rode no more this morning and what was my delight to find this evening that my bewhiskered pal had left on permission. I got another monitor, a fine one who put his hands on the side of the machine and let me do everything with a bit of assistance on the landing, which is different from what I've been doing on the Caudron. Seven rides and a finish—the twenty-three-metre tomorrow morning. I wasn't very good, but got by.

X

September 14, 1917.

Things for me are going all right. Have made progress on the Nieuport since last I wrote and will fly alone soon. As regards the U. S. Army, things are at a standstill until I get to Paris which will be a week or so. I hope to go to the front in a French *escadrille* and in an American uniform. Some say it can be done; some that it cannot. It sounds so sensible that I am afraid there must be some regulation against it.

XI

September 27, 1917.

Since last I wrote a regular letter, considerable has taken place. First, I am now at Pau, having finished up Avord. Have sent postcards to Father right along to keep track of movements. After *brevet* was over, I did not take the customary permission of forty-eight hours, but went straight to work on Nieuport, D. C. (double command). One cannot learn a great deal riding with an instructor—only about enough to keep from smashing in landing, because one never knows when the instructor is messing with the controls, when it's one's self. There are five kinds of Nieuports—differing mainly in size, the smaller being faster and more agile in the air, better adapted to eccentric flying. They are 28, 23, 18, 15, 13 (the baby Nieuport). At Avord I had about a week of D. C. on 28 and 23 (the numbers refer to size of wings) with several days of no work. Then some days on 23 alone and finally on 18 alone.

The landings are a bit different from those of the machines I had been flying as they are faster and the machines are quite nose-heavy. In the air the nose-heavy feature makes them "fly themselves"—that is, according to the speed of the motor the machine will rise and climb or *piqué* and descend, with never a touch from the pilot. If the weather is not very bad, the Nieuport will correct itself automatically from all displacements. But in landing the nose-heavy feature causes a great many *capotages*. If the landing isn't done about right with the tail low—over she goes on her nose or all the way onto her back. It is a very common occurrence and has become almost a joke. When a pupil capotes, everybody kids him—no one hurries over to see if he is hurt, not at all; he climbs out from under, usually cursing, and in ten minutes the truck is out to salvage the wreck.

It is astounding the way smashes are taken as a matter of course. Yesterday one chap in landing hit another machine, demolishing both but not touching either pilot. Being worth some \$15,000 or \$25,000, but no one seemed to worry—it's very much a matter of course. The monitor was a little peeved because he will be short of

machines for a few days, but that was all. I've seen as many as ten machines flat on their backs or with tails high in the air, on one field at the same time. For myself, I haven't capoted or busted any wood since the Blériot days. But I'm knocking on the wooden table now. On several occasions it has been only luck that saved me, as I've made many rotten landings.

Well, to get back to the diary. After finishing at Avord, I waited around for two days to get papers fixed up, requested and obtained permission and then decided not to use it and left straight for Pau after fond farewells to the friends I've been with for three and a half months. Looking back, I didn't have such a bad time at Avord after all, though I did get terribly tired of the living conditions.

My trip to Pau I put down to experience. I discovered one schedule not to travel by in future. Leaving Avord at 2:15 I got to Bourges at 2:45 and found that the train left at 7:29. Fortunately, there was another chap from the school on the train, Arthur Bluthenthal, an old Princeton football star, whom I have gotten to know quite well, so we managed to waste the afternoon together. At 7:29 I started another half

hour's journey, at the end of which the timetable said that the train for Bordeaux left at 10:30 (this is all P. M.).

At this town there were some American engineers, so I embraced the fellow countrymen in a strange land. Finished up a not very gay evening by attending the movies, a most odd institution. Clouds of tobacco smoke obscured the screen, and most of the action was around the bar at one side of the hall. Nobody was drunk, but nearly every one was drinking and very gay. This was merely Saturday night in a small town of the Provinces—not in gay Páree. At 10:15 I got in a first class compartment and tried to find a comfortable position in which to sleep. At 2:15 A. M. I had mussed up my clothes considerably, lost my temper and not slept a wink. Then we had to change again. The rest of the morning I sat opposite an American officer, a queer old fogey, and we tried to kid each other into thinking we were sleeping, with no success. Arrived at Bordeaux at 7 A. M., and found that the train for Pau left immediately, so I missed out on breakfast, too—Oh, it was a hectic trip. My idea of a very unpleasant occupation is that of a travelling salesman in France.

XII

October 22, 1917.

Ah, ——*:

Once more I take my pen in hand to lay at your feet the burdens of an overwrought (how is that word spelled?) mind, said burdens being caused by a most unpleasant captain. Just because I was in Paris for a day and a half without a permission, he handed me eight days of jail, and to-day for nothing at all he hauled me out in front of the entire division and got quite angered when I told him in extremely broken French that I hadn't understood a word. But as the jail doesn't mean anything and doesn't have to be served, I am not worrying very much. The afternoon is misty and there isn't a chance of flying, so he takes particular care that nobody leave the *piste* though there is absolutely nothing to do there, no chance to get warm or comfortable. Which at least gives me a perfect alibi for poor penmanship as I'm sitting in a machine and quite uncomfortable.

* One of his school friends.

Thoughtless creature, so much like the rest of your sex, why did you not tell me where Albert was to be over here, or what he was going to do, or what service he was in, or at least that he was in France? I cleverly deduced the latter from your letter, but did not know where to find him. When I got your letter I was at Pau, not far from Bordeaux (Didn't I write you or postal-card you from there?). Afterward at Paris, I talked to a few very dressed up ensigns with wings on them somewhere (Walker is the only name I remember), and they told me that —— was near Bordeaux and in the same group with themselves. So if, etc., I might have gone to see the Big Boy.

Yesterday I went to see Billy and another classmate in an artillery camp the other side of Paris. They are officers of the U. S. A. and live as such, which incites in me much envy as I am still a mere corporal of France and treated with no more than my due—not quite as much I sometimes think. That was the expedition that brought the jail. Lots and lots of people are getting over here now. I've seen Heyliger Church and Kelly Craig who are about to become aviators somewhere. Porter Guest just be-

came breveted (that is, a licensed pilot) and was considerably seen in Paris shortly after—no end of college friends are over here and even an occasional American girl is seen in Paris. No friends as yet.

Your letter—I asked at Morgan Harjes about Miss —— and found that she is at the front in a hospital, so I can't very well find her in Paris. I'm sorry as I would very much have liked to. What one might call permanent people are very nice to know in Paris. I don't know anything about the front yet, but if I'm near Miss ——'s hospital, will try to get acquainted.

What you said about —— and his going, I can pretty well appreciate. There isn't a thing in the world to worry us unmarried and very independent young men over here. If something happens to us, it will bother you all back home a great deal more than us. It's very, very true that women have the heaviest and worst part of war. I had to write a letter the other day to the mother of a pal over here who shot himself when out of his head. A fine pilot and an exceptionally charming fellow, how I pity his poor mother. It's almost unbelievable the number of women one sees in black here in France. Thank God, it

can never become that bad at home, for the war will never get so close to us as it has to the French.

I haven't the inspiration to compose an imaginative aeronautic thriller to-day about the experiences of a boy aviator. Since last writing, have finished Nieuport at Avord, went to Pau and there did acrobacy, came here to Plessis-Belleville and started Spad, now await assignment to an *escadrille* which ought to come within a week. Haven't broken any wood since Bleriot days, but have been a bit more rational and done about average good work. The preliminary training is over—combat training doesn't amount to anything till we get to the front. I'll be on a monoplace machine surely. So in my next you can expect to hear mighty tales of combating the Boche at a high altitude. I'm beginning to hear that it's nothing but a lot of routine work, few combats and pretty soon a frightful bore: I refuse to believe it and hang on to romance for all I'm worth.

Give my regards to a whole lot of people and tell them I haven't quite given up all hope of a letter though almost. My friends as a group are not very strong on letter writing. There are only

a very few shining exceptions like yourself and
verily they do make of me the heart glad.

But enough of this, 'tis bootless, so I sign my-
self,

Thine as of yore,

STUART.

XIII

**Escadrille Spa-84,
Secteur Postal 181,
Par A. C. M.—Paris.
November 1, 1917.**

Well, I'm here—in sight of the front at last. To date I haven't been out there yet and won't for a few days more as they take lots of care of new pilots and don't feed them to the Boche right away. Probably day after tomorrow the lieutenant in command will take me out to show me around the lines and after that I'll take my place in patrols with the others. The work is exclusively patrolling, establishing as it were a barrage against German machines and preventing as far as possible any incursions of the French lines. As the big attack is over, there is comparatively little activity. Sometimes one goes for a whole patrol without being fired on and without seeing an enemy machine anywhere near the lines. During the three days I've been here, the group has accounted for several Boches without any

losses whatever. Young Bridgeman of the Lafayette Escadrille had a bullet through his fuselage just in front of his chest, but suffered no damage except from fright.

There are several *escadrilles* in the group, a *groupe de combat*—it is called—all have Spads which makes it very nice. The Lafayette, 124, is of our group and have adjoining barracks, which makes it very nice (I seem to repeat) for us lone Americans in French *escadrilles*. We drop in there far too often and the first few nights I used the bed of the famous Bill Thaw's roommate, away on permission. Did I write you that one morning he brought in Whiskey to wake me up, and my eye no sooner opened than my head was buried under the covers. Whiskey is a pet—a very large lion cub, which has unfortunately outgrown its utility as a pet and was sent yesterday, with its running mate, Soda, to the Zoo at Paris, to be a regular lion.

They are a very odd crowd—the members of the Lafayette Escadrille, a few nice ones and a bunch of rather roughnecks. Their conversation is an eye opener for a new arrival. Mostly about Paris, permissions, and the rue de Braye, but occasionally about work and that *is* interesting.

Nonchalant doesn't express it. When Bridgy got shot up as mentioned above, they all kidded the life out of him and when he got the Croix de Guerre, they had him almost in tears—just because he's the kiddable kind.

But in talking about the work—for instance, Jim Hall: "I *piqué*d on him with full motor and got so darn close to him that when I wanted to open fire I was so scared of running into him that I had to yank out of the way and so never fired a single shot." Or Lufberry just mentions in passing that he got another Boche this morning, but those ——— observer people won't give him credit for it. He has fourteen official now and probably twice as many more never allowed him. Some days ago during the attack he had seven fights in one day, brought down six of them and got credit for one. Which must be discouraging.

XIV

November 5, 1917.

Well ———*:

Here I find myself writing to you without waiting for the usual two or three months to elapse. Do you realize that it was over five and a half months ago that I left my native land? It doesn't seem near so long to me. Just at present I have about thirteen hours a day to write, read the *Washington Star* and *New York Times*, eat an occasional meal (we only get two over here, worse luck), build fires in the stove and stroll for exercise. The rest of the time is devoted to sleep. A terribly hard life that of an aviator on the western front! No *appels* (meaning roll calls), discipline or inspections. Only, if there should happen to be a good day, one might be wanted to fly a bit. So far (I have only been out here a week) we have had perfectly ideal aviators' weather—nice low misty clouds about 800 or 400 feet up, which quite prevent aerial activity

* One of his school friends.

and yet one is not bothered by mud or depressed by rain. In the morning, one awakes, pokes his head out the window, says "What lo! more luck, a nice light *brouillard*," and closes the window for a few hours more of sleep. Really I have done more resting the past week than most people do in a lifetime!

To get statistical, I finished up at Pau (from where I sent to you a letter, *n'est-ce-pas?*) a month ago, and then spent two very unpleasant weeks at Plessis-Belleville near Paris, at the big dépôt for the front, waiting to be sent to an *escadrille*, with nothing to do but a little desultory flying, nurse the system, food, weather, lodging, discipline, etc. Eventually my turn came and, with another American, I was dispatched to Esc. SPA 84, where we arrived after the usual delay passing through Paris. That's one nice thing about this country: all roads lead to Paris. Sent from one place to another, it is a safe wager that one goes *via* Paris, and always takes forty-eight hours there and gets permission for it if he can. There are a few Frenchmen there still, but on the streets one sees almost entirely American, British or British Colonial officers—occasionally a French aviator and of course clouds of sweet and

innocent young things—yes? Nearly all of my classmates are over here and get to Paris every once in a while, so all I have to do is to sit at the Café de le Paix and if I wait long enough, some one I know will surely come along.

Well, to get back on the track, we eventually found ourselves members of le-dit Esc. SPA 84—one esc. of a *groupe de chasse*, which means that we will have patrolling work to do mainly and not protection of observation or photo machines—which they tell me, is fortunate. Also we have good machines—the best there are, which might not have happened had we been sent to another type of *escadrille*—purely good fortune. The much advertised Lafayette Esc. No. 124, is a member of the same group, is located near us and does the same work, which makes it much pleasanter for lone Americans. We use their stove and tea of an afternoon quite freely as our quarters are new and not fixed up. But say, when we do get going, everybody will be in to see us. We'll have a cosy, beautifully wallpapered room clustering around a stove. . . . The men of 124 are a rather good crowd—not much different from any crowd of Americans, a bit rough but most of it affected because they're away from

home, very hospitable, rather daredevil or hard-hearted (whichever you wish to call it—the way they talk about each other's narrow escapes, coming falls, the mistakes or misfortunes of departed brothers, and there have been several) and very mixed, centering around Lieutenant Bill Thaw, of the French Army, who impresses me as being very much of a leader and an unusually fine type. There is one tough nut from a Middle Western Siwash-like college, who was probably still ungraduated at 27, and a quiet, innocent looking kid who seems to have just got out of prep school; of course, the tough guy tears the little one. Then there are a couple of old *Légionnaires*—rather superior and terribly tired of war, quite unenthusiastic, but I dare say congenial when one gets under their hide or fills it full of booze. And Jim Hall, the author chap—quiet, reserved, almost simple in his lack of affectation and boyish in his enthusiasm. (Gad, how he wants to get his Boche and he almost thinks he did the other day, but it wasn't verified. He followed him down from 1,500 to 200 metres, shooting all the time, and thinks he must have brought him down). . . .

Did I mention above that I am at present in

the status, practically, of a non-flying member? On arriving at the front, one is not rushed straightway to the cannon's mouth, but rather allowed to get acclimated a bit first, to have a few preliminary voyages to look around, etc. During my week here, there has been little flying and I haven't even seen the front, only heard the guns occasionally. Of my three flights, two were just short *tours de champs*. But the other: never in my wildest Blériot days did I do a wilder one. Coming from Pau where I had tried some stunts, I thought I was a bit of an acrobat, second only to Navarre, Guynemer and a few others. So arriving at a safe height, I started to go through the *répertoire*. First came a loop which got around to the vertical point—a quarter turn and then slipped, ending in a vertical corkscrew or climbing barrel turn or whatever you want to call it—then losing momentum and just naturally tumbling. I didn't know what was going on—only that it wasn't right; they told me afterward. After that came the *renversements* and vertical turns, etc., and not a thing came out. Lost—I got lost thirty times and had to hunt all around to see where I was. Nothing went right and I kept getting madder and madder and

poorer and poorer. They were all laughing down below and wondering what was going on up there. Eventually the party ended—one of the old pilots told me that that one flight equalled about thirty hours over the lines and the commander advised against a repetition of the performance, and so I went and lay down. Two hours later I began to feel that perhaps I could stand on my feet again; did you ever have *mal-de-mer*?

So now I really ought to begin to learn something, having acquired that all essential first knowledge of ignorance, which all good students should have. And in the meantime perhaps I shall go and combat the Wily Hun. Said W. Hun need not worry about my bothering him if he doesn't keep fooling around under my nose till I'm ashamed not to go after him. I'm not bloodthirsty a bit, especially till I learn to fly, and the lack of combats isn't going to keep me awake nights for a while yet.

But the bunkmate seems to have gone to bed; it's almost ten—a most unprecedented hour for me to be up, so the end approaches. Kind remembrances as usual—use your discretion and don't forget that long tale of “Washington So-

cial Tid-Bits" you spoke of—gossip if you prefer. . . .

As ever,
STUART.

The Next Day.

Addenda:

Your letter on just arriving home has been with me some time and truly brought joy to my heart in this desolate land. (The "desolate" seems to fit in though not applying to the land in question at all.) . . .

Chester Snow is aviating under the auspices of the U. S. Government. I last heard from him in a postal written on the last stop of the last triangle of his brevet, so he should be through training before much longer. The other Chester, Bassett, is still at Avord, so I can not deliver your note to him. . . .

Your other question referred to the army I am in, and is easily answered by saying that the U.S.A. has as yet done nothing but talk about taking us over. "Us" now refers to upward of 200 Americans, I think, either in French *escadrilles* or well advanced in the French schools. Constantly all summer, we have been "going to be transferred in two weeks."

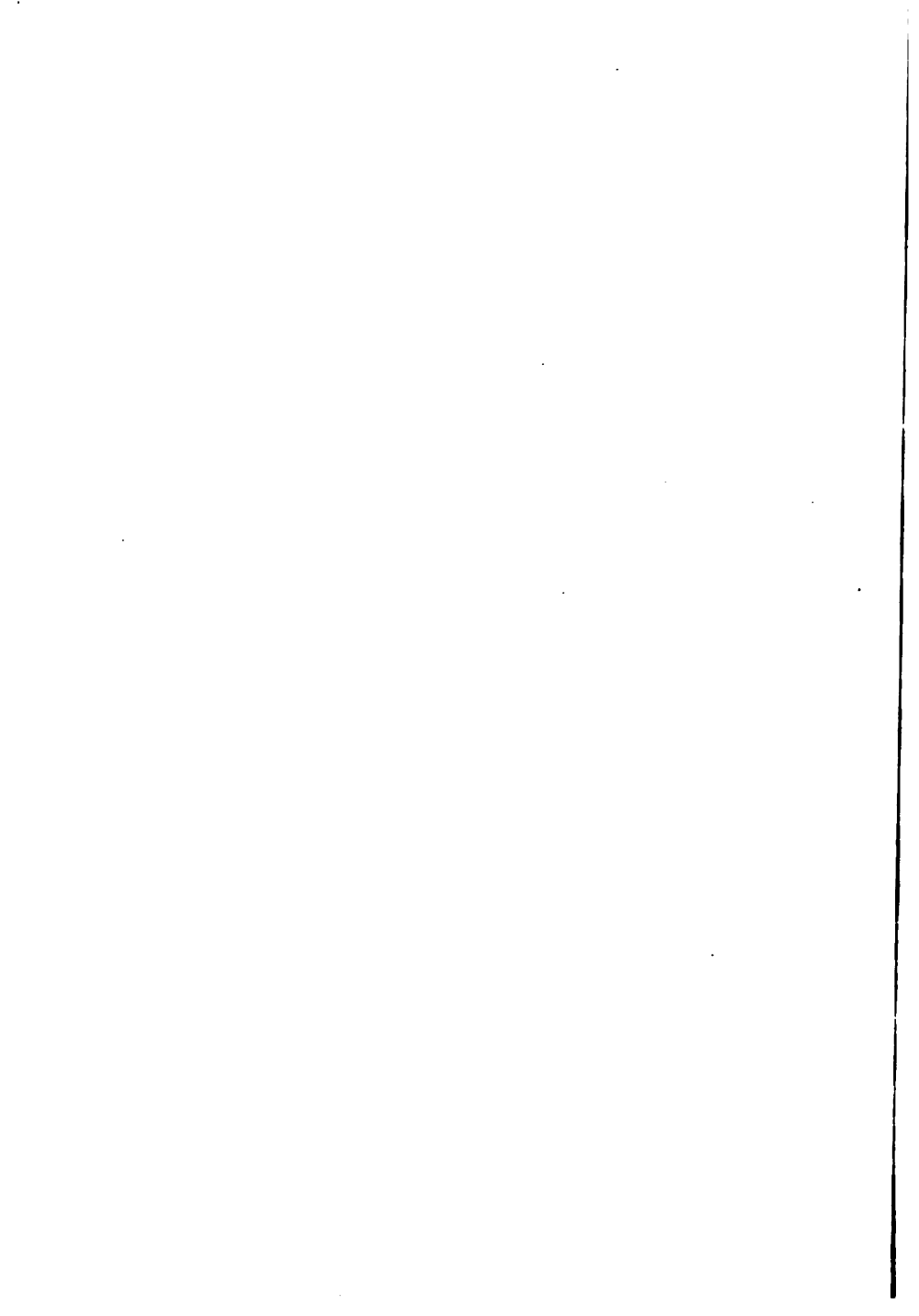
Another quiet, non-flying, slightly rainy day has passed. This isn't perhaps the most ideal spot in the world for a winter resort, from the point of view of comforts, but, considering the ease of conscience because one is not in the position to be called *embusqué*, it is really not half bad. It's starting to rain again rather harder; I wonder if the roof will keep out water?

Yours, etc.,

B. S. W.



WAR CROSS WITH PALM, AWARDED
IN RECOGNITION OF WALCOTT'S
SERVICES



XV

November 10, 1917.

Evening.

You know November in France. I've been here almost two weeks now and am still *à l'entraînement*, that is, I haven't started in to do any regular work yet. Only five times have I been able to fly in two weeks. But I've got my own machine, and mechanic, everything is in order and I've been assigned to a patrol the last two mornings when it rained. Tomorrow again at 8:50 with four others—patrol for one hour and fifty minutes at about 15,000 feet, back and forth over our sector, sometimes over our own lines, sometimes in Bochie. I'm getting very impatient to get started. In what few flights I've had, I've been working on acrobacy a bit and am gradually learning a few simple things; twice I stayed up a little too long and had to lie down a few hours afterward, almost seasick.

I like Spa 84 very much indeed. The Frenchmen there are much more regular fellahs than most of those I've been with in the schools.

Wertheimer, a sergeant, is a sort of informal and unadmitted chief of the *sous-officiers*. It is he that speaks English and has helped us a lot in getting settled, etc. Very much of a gentleman he is, and understands a bit Anglo-Saxon customs and eccentricities, always gay and an indefatigable worker. We have all been arranging the one big room of our barracks—dining room, reading room, and probably eventually American bar. The walls are covered with green cloth, green paper (of two different shades and neither quite the same as the cloth), red cloth (on top as a sort of frieze) and red paper. The ceiling is done in white cloth to keep in heat and lighten the room. A monumental task it has been, especially as materials are hard to get and expensive. Wertem (as Wertheimer is called) and Deborte have done most of the work. Deborte is also *chef de popote*, which means housekeeper, and a very efficient man. For four francs per day we are fed amazingly well, especially when one realizes that we are near the front in a country which has had three years of war. Deborte hasn't the pleasantest manner in the world at times, but usually is very agreeable, willing to tell me things about flying or the *escadrille*, always ready to

work, and a dependable man in the air. And Verber who rooms with Wertem,—he speaks a little English, has a great deal of trouble understanding it, but is picking up. Wears a monocle all the time because he's got a bum eye, carries a stick and has an extremely eccentric appearance, but withal is very agreeable and a very valuable man. He has the habit of taking long trips all alone far into Germany just to see what is going on. Pinot is the name of the little roly-poly chap everybody calls Bul-Bul, who used to be a mechanic and now is a very good, merry pilot. He has a great *pension* toward Pinard, is violently but not at all objectionably non-aristocratic, is forever laughing or kidding some one, walks on his hands to amuse people, and is the delight of all the *mécanos*. Demeuldre is a very quiet sort of school boy type who has been a pilot of biplanes and reconnaissance machines for a long time. He came to the escadrille recently with a record of two Boches as pilot of a biplane (that is, his machine gun man did the shooting and they both get credit), and a few days ago brought down a German in flames, his first as *pilote de chasse*. There are two others away on permission, whom I don't know yet.

XVI

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,

November 13, 1917.

Dear Father:

Campbell was in the Lafayette Escadrille and they are a member of the same group as Spa 84, so I have asked them about him. He was on a patrol with another chap, they attacked some Boches and when it was over the other chap was alone. Campbell was brought down in German territory and so reported missing. I believe that the chap he was with has seen and talked to Campbell's father or some close relative since. Another chap named Bulkley was brought down in similar circumstances about the first of September. Ten days ago, word was received from the American Embassy that he had communicated with them, a prisoner in Germany. There are many similar cases, where men brought down with crippled machines or wounded escape destruction by a miracle. The only sure thing is when a machine goes down in flames or is seen to lose a wing or two.

For instance, there are two officers in the group who are in the best of health and daily working. Several months ago, they were on patrol together, collided in the air. One cut the tail rigging completely off the other and they separated, one without a tail and the other with various parts of a tail mixed among the cables and struts of one side of his machine. They both landed in France, one on his wheels followed by a *capotage* or somersault turnover, the other quite completely upside down. Then a term in the hospital and back they are again. Kenneth Marr, an American, had the commands of both his tail controls cut in a combat, the rudder and elevator, leaving him nothing but the *aileron*—the lateral balance control and the motor. He landed with only a skinned nose for casualties and got a decoration for it.

Another chap in an attack on captive balloons, *drachens*, dove for something like 10,000 feet *vertically* and with *full motor* on, thereby gaining considerable speed as you can imagine. He came right on top of the balloon, shot and to keep from hitting it, yanked as roughly as he could, flattening out his dive in the merest fraction of a second. Imagine the strain on the machine!

When he got home, all the wires had several inches sag in them; the metal connections of the cables in the struts and wood of the wings had bit into the wood enough to give the sag.

Machines are built to stand immense pressure on the under side of the wings. In some acrobatic manoeuvres I was trying the other day, I made mistakes and caused the machine to stall and then fall in such a way that the full weight was supported by the *upper surface*—by the wires which in most machines are supposed merely to support the weight of the wings when the machine is on the ground. Yes, the Spad is a well built machine, the nearest thing to perfection in point of strength, speed and climbing power I've seen yet. Of course it's heavy and that's why they put 150-230 HP in them. The other school, that of a light machine with a light motor—depending for its success on lack of weight rather than excess of power, may supplant the heavier machine in time—I can't tell. So, as anyone who knows has said right along, there is a long way to go in the development of the J N or even the little tri-plane, before American built planes get to the front. Of the bombing game, I don't know anything at all.

Yesterday there was a *revue* here in honor of Guynemer, and decorations for the pilots of the group who had won them. Three Americans received the Croix de Guerre—members of the Lafayette Escadrille. Lufberry, the American ace, carried the American flag presented to the *escadrille* by Mrs. McAdoo and the employees of the Treasury Department—besides the two aviation emblems of France. He was called to receive his decoration “for having in the course of one day held seven combats, descended one German plane in flames, and forced five others to land behind their lines” (which means that he is officially credited with one, his thirteenth, and that the other five though probably brought down, do not count for him because there were not the necessary witnesses required by the French regulation). Being the bearer of the flag, he was a very worried man to know what to do with the flag when he should go up to get his medal, till one of the fellows in 124 (the Lafayette) came to his rescue.

For a military *revue* it was decidedly amusing. Aviators are not very military. The chief of one of the *escadrilles* was commissioned to command the mechanics who are plain soldiers with rifles

and steel helmets for the occasion. He is a bit of a clown and amused the entire gathering, kidding with the officers. The pilots of each of the five *escadrilles* were in more or less formation, most of them with hands in their pockets for it was chilly, and presenting a mixture of uniforms unparalleled in its heterogeneity. Every branch of the service represented and endless personal ideas in dress. Because of the occasion, *repos* has been granted to the entire group for the afternoon, another group taking over our patrols. So that after the *revue*, everyone had the afternoon to waste—a sunny day which is quite unusual this month. Within a half hour, every machine that was in working order was in the air—forming into groups and then off for the lines, just looking for trouble—a voluntary patrol they call it. Which opened my eyes a bit to the spirit in the French service after three years of war.

Word from Paris that those Americans in the French service who have demanded their release to join the U. S. A. have obtained that release—which probably means that all we wait for now . . . is the commissions.

This afternoon I took another trip with one of the old pilots to look over the sector. We stayed

over France and didn't get into trouble although there were lots of Boches around. Hope to get really started soon. . . . An amusing one this morning: two pilots from the group were on patrol and attacked a single German about two kilometres behind the German lines. They completely outmanoeuvred him, he got cold feet and started for the French lines, giving himself up. The funniest part about it is that the machine gun of one of the attackers was jammed and he couldn't possibly have hurt the Boche—just had the nerve to stay and throw a bluff. They came back to camp just before dark this evening, one of them flying the German machine and the other guarding him in a Spad. The machine is an Albatross monoplane (biplane)—finished in silver with big black crosses on the wings and tail—a really beautiful thing. It flew around camp for several minutes before landing. It is the second machine that has been scared down since I've been out here.

XVII

AT THE FRONT,
SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,
November 17, 1917.

At present things are hopelessly slow on account of bad weather, so I have a good deal of time to write and naught to write of. I still am waiting for my baptism of active service which is assigned for each day and held up on account of fog, low clouds or rain. In the afternoon it usually lifts a little, not enough to fly over the lines, but sufficient to permit a little *vol d'entrainement*, a practice flight around the field. I've been taking every chance to learn to fly, practicing reversements, vertically banked turns, 90° nose dives, etc. Two day ago, we had a very interesting mimic combat in the air. The Boche machine, which has been captured, and a Spad, both driven by very clever pilots, manoeuvred for position during fifteen or twenty minutes at 1,000 feet or less, back and forth over the field, doing almost every possible thing in the air—changing

direction with incredible rapidity, diving, climbing, wing slipping, upside down dives—everything under the sun.

Two of them were at it again today in two Spads, just manoeuvring. What a lot there is to learn! When I got through acrobacy at Pau, I had the impression that that kind of stuff was relatively easy—now I know different. For the present I'm working on the system of try one thing at a time—get that fairly well and then commence another. And small doses—ten or fifteen minutes for an acrobatic flight, not more, because one can easily get dangerously sick in a very short time. Not that there is any particular peril in getting ill in the air, only it's beastly uncomfortable!

XVIII

AT THE FRONT—SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

November 30, 1917.

The rumor at the Lafayette Escadrille this evening is that they have been at last transferred. Of course they had similar rumors many times before. For myself I am becoming rather indifferent, very well satisfied here except for weather, and getting what I came over here for.

Father mentioned something about a monitor's job (after I had had experience at the front). My present inclination is decidedly against the idea. There is no job in the world I like less to think of and there are plenty of people who want to get comfortably settled in the rear, so let them, say I, and may they enjoy it. It is not a very pleasant job. As a retirement after a period of service at the front it is another matter. Of all people I can think of I have the smallest right to an *embusqué* job at present—so here I hope to stay. Whether I fly with an American or French uniform I don't care very much at the present

moment. I had rather get a Boche than any commission in the army, but one cannot always tell about the future; perhaps after a few good scares I'll be ready to jump at a monitor's job.

XIX

AT THE FRONT,

December 1, 1917.

I tried to give you all some idea of the strength of a Spad in a letter a while ago. At home people speak of a factor of safety, meaning the number of times stronger the machine is than is necessary for plain flying. The Spad is made so that a man can't bust it no matter what he does in the air—dive as far and as fast as he can and stop as brutally as he can—it stands the racket. Of course, motors do stop and if it happens over a mountain range—well, that's just hard luck.

Have had a few patrols since last I wrote. One at a high height, 4,000-4,500 metres, considerably above the clouds which almost shut out the ground below, wonderfully beautiful sight but beastly cold, and a couple when the clouds were low and solid. The patrol stays at just the height of the clouds, hiding in them and slipping out again to look around. If it gets below, the enemy anti-aircraft guns pepper it whenever

near the lines and at a low altitude that is rather awkward—so the patrol shows itself as little as possible.

It's lots of sport to try to keep with the patrol: be behind the chief of patrol, see him disappear and then bump into a fog bank, a low-hanging cloud and not see a darn thing. Then dive down out of the cloud wondering whether the other guy is right underneath or not; shoot out of the cloud and see him maybe 500 yards away going at right angles. Then bank up and turn around fast and give her the gear—full speed to catch up and so on. See a Boche regulating artillery fire, start to manoeuvre into range and zip! he's out of sight in the clouds and the next you see he is beating it far back of his lines. Not very dangerous this weather, but lots of fun.

XX

December 3rd, 1917.

Dear ———*:

Thanks for the merry, merry wishes for the gay Xmas season and I'll try to remember them when the day comes along. Sundays and holidays are not very much noticed here at the front, except that on Sunday the mechanics all get full of *pinard* and song and devilment—the *pinard* (meaning cheap red ink used by the French in place of drinking water) is of course responsible for the two latter. In the villages, the entire male population likewise drinks much wine and every one—man, woman, child, dog, and domestic animal, parades the streets—dressed up all like a picture book (applying mostly to women and children). Occasionally they cross the sidewalk, but the middle of the street is *the* place to walk.

One Sunday, I went to church, the first time since last Easter, I think, to attend the mass given for the departed brethren of the *escadrille*.

* One of his school friends.

The chapel is in a little town a few miles from our camp. Along in the Middle Ages or anyway a long time ago, there was a beautiful cathedral there—now the town is insignificantly small. The front of the cathedral is standing almost in its entirety and the walls for a little way back, dwindling down into glorious ruins and finally tumbled masses of rock and stray pillars. Where the back wall once stood, there now runs a little brook (I almost called it bubbling, but it happens to be an unusually dead and not over-clean little stream). The chapel is a place about as big as a minute, snuggling in beside the big front wall of the ancient cathedral. The service was meaningless to me—what wasn't Latin was French. I followed the fellow in front of me and didn't miss it once on the getting up and down (fortunately, *militaires* don't have to kneel, I suppose because they appreciate the fact that most of them wear breeches made by French tailors).

But they fooled me once. What must have been the village belle (what a village!) passed a little button bag affair in baby blue ribbon, and gathered up the shekels. I dropped mine in and horror—here comes the young sister with

an identical bag and asks for more and I was unprepared and had to turn her down amidst my blushes. I thought she was working on the other side of the house as we used to do at evening service and to this day I don't know why they took up two collections though it has been explained to me three times in French.

Have had some very pleasant trips over the German border (present, not 1914), have watched a few Archies bursting at a safe distance away and seen some specks which were Boche planes, but am not ready to write a book yet. Yesterday morning we had the first sortie at 6:45 daylight. A solid bank of clouds over the camp here at 2,000 metres. The lines are parallel to a river and a few kilometres north. The edge of the cloud bank was over the river, sharp as if cut by a knife and all Germany cloudless. We slipped out from under it and back on top just in time to see the sun get over the horizon—almost as far away as Rheims, which we just cannot see. The river and canal were just silver ribbons on a black cloth stretching for miles due east. Under us we could make out the ground on one side and the clouds on the other, and to

the west the cloud bank continued to follow the lines, a gloriously beautiful panorama. The cloud bank stayed nearly the same the two hours we were up. From a distance above or below, a cloud is just a big, soft, quiet cushion of cotton fluff, but near to it is a seething, irregular, tossing, furious jumble of mist.

We saw a few Boches, far behind their lines. An hour after we were back, they said that Lufbery had just brought down another machine, his 15th, in flames. He was using a new machine and the gun was not properly regulated—seven balls were in each blade of the propeller, yet it held together and brought him home. I was down at the Lafayette hangars talking to Bill Thaw, and here comes the mighty man in a hurry from reporting his flight. With fire in his eye he got in his old machine and off again for the lines. At noon he had brought down another, which hasn't yet been officially *homologué*, but is none the less sure for that. Thaw brought down one this morning. They are doing well, these men of the American Escadrille—still French, however, though shortly to be transferred, we hear.

May your Xmas be a happy one, and the new year and those to follow bring you ever better fortune than the last one.

STUART.

XXI

Châlons-sur-Marne.

December 8, 1917.

Dear ———*:

I got the *Sunday Star* a few days ago and there was that same old picture and ——— staring me in the face! A very nice write-up, I thought it. What a bunch of big-wigs they did gather together! We packed up bag and baggage yesterday and flew off to a new place, and here we are waiting for the baggage to catch up. I have grave fears that there may be some fighting one of these days, and if so, I think it will be about time for me to get out of this war. Cheery oh!

STUART.

* One of his school friends.

XXII

CHALONS SUR MARNE.

December 8, 1917.

Yesterday we were awakened at 6 and told that we were going to move out, bag and baggage at 2. So now as new barracks were not ready we came down here last night and have been seeing the sights of the town since. It is full of Americans, ambulances, doctors, Y. M. C. A. workers, everything but fighting men which I trust we'll see before long.

STUART.

THE FINAL COMBAT

On December 12, while on patrol, Stuart Walcott met a German biplane carrying two men. Three cable reports agree that he shot down and destroyed this machine about two and a half miles within the German lines. He then started back for the French lines and was overtaken by four Albatross German planes. He was overcome and his machine went down in a nose dive within the German lines, it being assumed that either he was shot or his machine disabled.

There was still a hope that he might have escaped death. Inquiries were at once instituted through the American Red Cross and the International Red Cross, with the result that on January 7 a cable came from the International Red Cross stating that it was reported in Germany that S. Walcott was brought down during the afternoon of December 12 near Saint Souplet, and that he was killed by the fall.

STUART WALCOTT

[A biographical note written by his father.]

Benjamin Stuart Walcott was sturdy and self-reliant as a boy and very early developed strong personal initiative, good sense and courage. I find in my notebook under an entry of July 6, 1905, a few days before Stuart's ninth birthday, that with him and his brother Sidney I had measured a section of over 10,000 feet in thickness of rock with dip compass and rod in northern Montana, and that that night we slept out on the Continental Divide after a sandwich apiece for supper. On July 16, "Went up the Gordon Creek with Stuart and cut a few trees out of the trail." And on the next day, "Stuart assisted me in collecting fossils from the Middle Cambrian Rocks."

In 1906 Stuart helped in gathering Cambrian fossils in central Montana, and in recognition of his effective work one of the new species of shells was named after him, *Micromitra (Paterina) stuarti*.

He also assisted in British Columbia in geological work during the summer of 1907, and in 1908, when twelve years old, he was placed with one packer in charge of a pack train operating in what is now the Glacier Park, Montana, and in southern British Columbia. On this trip one morning I heard faint rifle shots, and upon overtaking the pack train found Stuart shooting away with a 22 gauge rifle at a grizzly bear, which was some distance down the slope below the trail. On reminding him of the danger, he said he wanted to drive the bear away to prevent a stampede of the animals.

Both at home and in school his actions were largely influenced by a determination first to know what was the right thing to do, and guided by this habit, when it looked as though the United States would enter the European War, he decided that it was his duty to take part in it. When the Lusitania was sunk he felt strongly that the United States should take a positive stand in favor of the freedom of the seas, that the rights of Americans should be protected even if it meant war, and he was ready to fight for it.

In common with the majority of the youth of America, he had the feeling that it was a patriotic

duty and privilege to offer personal service to the Nation when its ideals and motives were assailed by a foreign foe. He first offered his services to the Signal Corps and received a temporary appointment. Realizing that training as an expert aviator could be more quickly obtained in France than in this country, he went to France and enlisted in the French Army with the expectation of being transferred later to the American forces. This would have been done prior to his being shot down within the German lines on December 12, had he not been awaiting action by the United States Aviation Service in France in examining and arranging for the transfer of the American aviators in the French Army to the service of the United States.

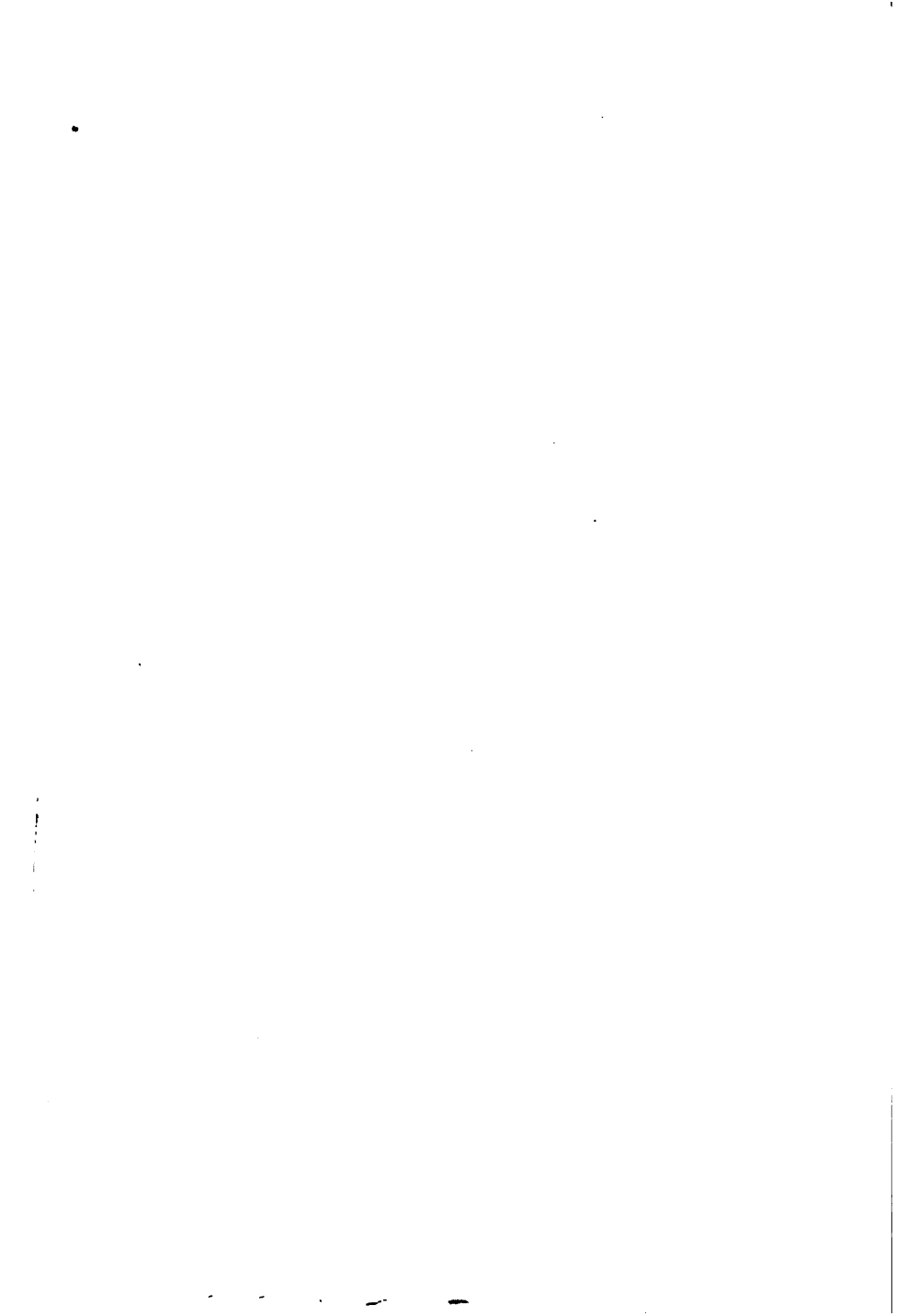
Throughout his life the dominating thought was to be of positive service wherever he might be placed. At the same time he was thoroughly a boy and enjoyed a frolic and fun as much as any one of his companions.

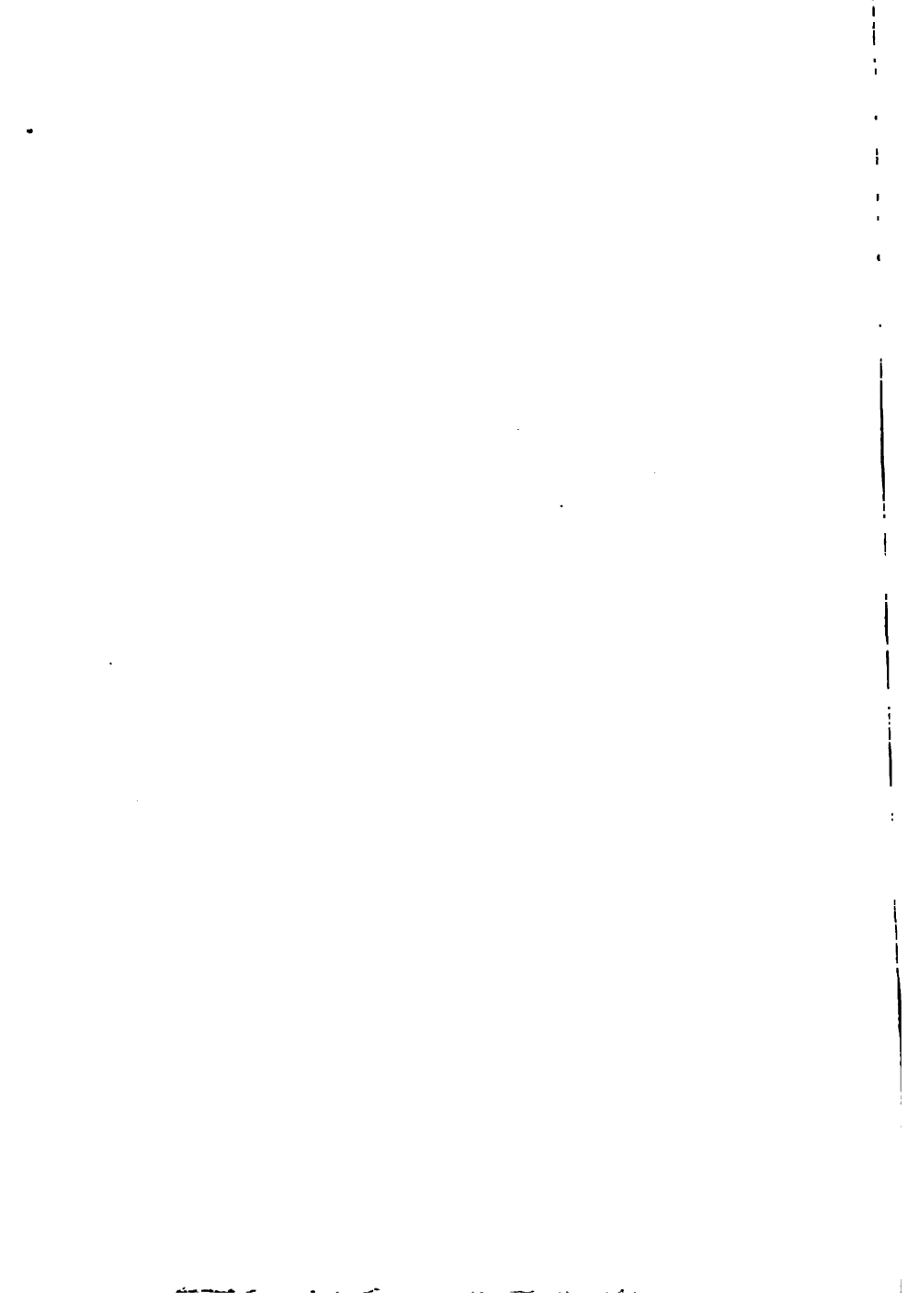
He prepared for college at the Taft School, expecting to enter Yale, and passed the examinations for that university before he was sixteen. Upon further consideration he selected Princeton, largely because of the preceptorial method

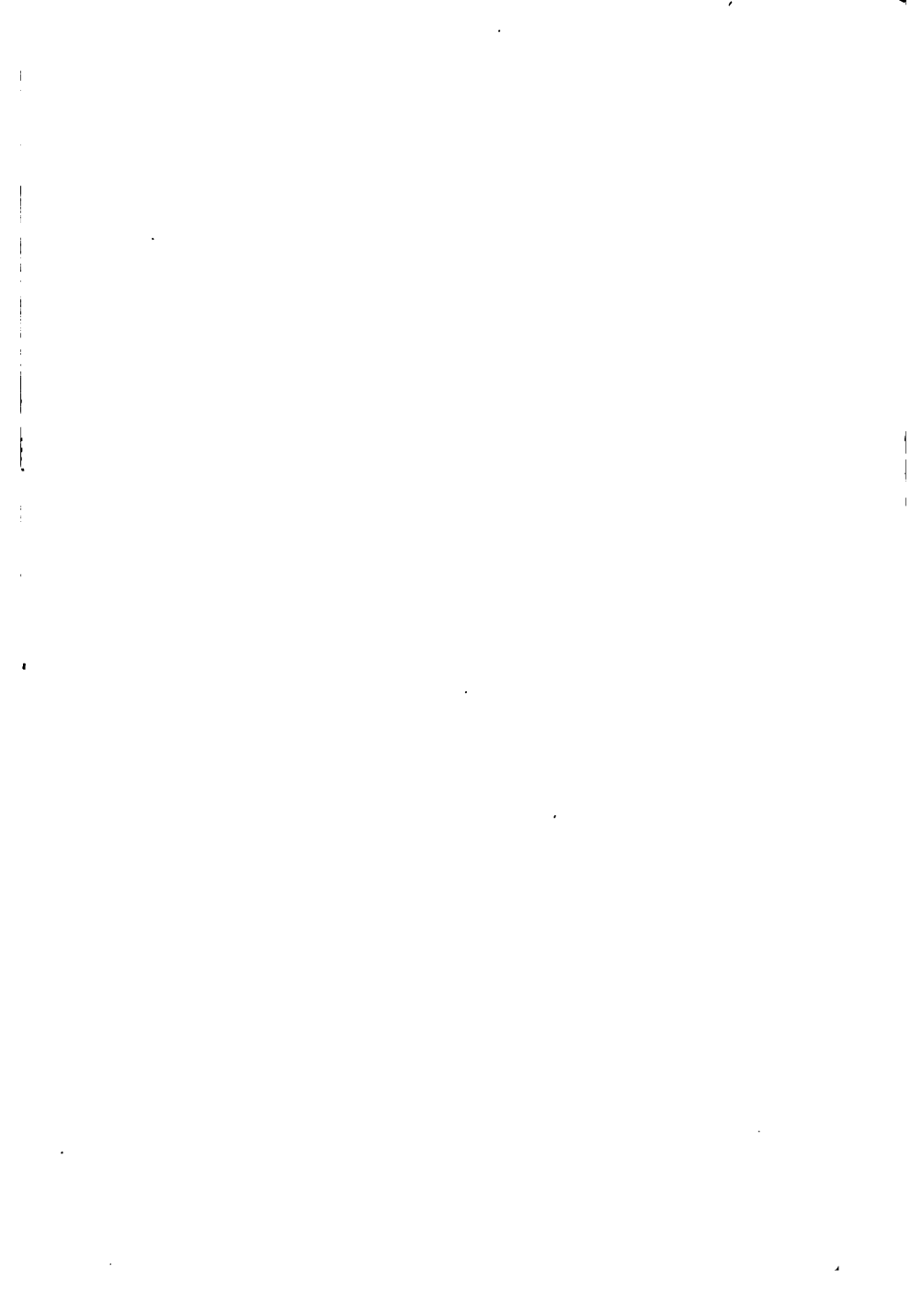
of training, and was a senior when he decided to enter the service of his country.

Stuart was an unusually well balanced boy and youth; his moral convictions were sound, definite, and expressed by action rather than words.

CHARLES D. WALCOTT.









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